

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS

THE CANNERY SITE has provided insights into the history and technology of canning in Delaware while that industry was growing to its eventual level of overwhelming importance in the state's economy. Some ambiguities remain concerning the actual history of the site and relative dates of various elements.

It was impossible to test the entire footprint of the factory, since a modern duplex apartment house stands on it, outside the project's impact. What was found was a foundation of two buildings 100 and 70 by 24 feet, with wings ten feet wide. The widths of the main building and of the wings were consistent with the 1870-1874 cannery, but the length does not match. The original building was 80 feet long. The first addition to the north added another 85 feet. The final extension brought the total length of 216 feet, as described in Kent County Mutual declaration 4629. This was the building that burned in December 1874.

The boiler base found west of the cannery is consistent with the second description of a boiler for the first cannery in the Kent County Mutual insurance papers; its construction of recycled bricks indicates that it was not among the earliest structures in the complex. Unfortunately, there are no declarations for the second cannery, since Collins, Paschall, and Cotter did not insure it with Kent County Mutual.

The archæological remains are consistent with reconstruction on a reduced scale, using part of the original foundations for a building only 65 or 70 feet long. Since no below-grade boilers are mentioned in the earlier policies anywhere near this location, they must be ascribed to the later structure or to the evaporator; insurance surveyors were very careful about noticing boilers. This would have been the building that burned in 1884 (FIGURE 19). The resulting factory would have been remarkably similar to a plan published by a Baltimore cannery machine builder (FIGURE 4, PAGE 28).

Abundant evidences of rebuildings added confusion to the picture. Near the southeast corner, the foundation wall has been augmented with two brick piers. About 65 feet from the southeast corner is a brick pier, obviously later than the robbed-out foundation wall, that has been inserted into the wall alignment (FIGURE 20). In the middle of the north endwall is a totally robbed configuration of rubble that seems to represent another L-shaped footer superimposed on the original plan.

Since can waste lay bedded over the northeast corner of the robbed footing, it appears that the waste was deposited after that particular structure was destroyed. The top layer of the waste, therefore, may be ascribed to the second cannery. A robber trench associated with the salvage of the northeast pier did not expose the entire pier, which remained buried under undisturbed can waste.

The rough brick wall found under the middle of the building appears to be a later attempt to shore up the second building, since it was made from bricks different from the original ones, and since it obviously was not laid out by reference to landmarks and the square of the structure. Such a footer could have been placed under the second building to accommodate heavy new equipment or to remedy a sag caused by heavy machines in the middle of such a long span over loose fill.

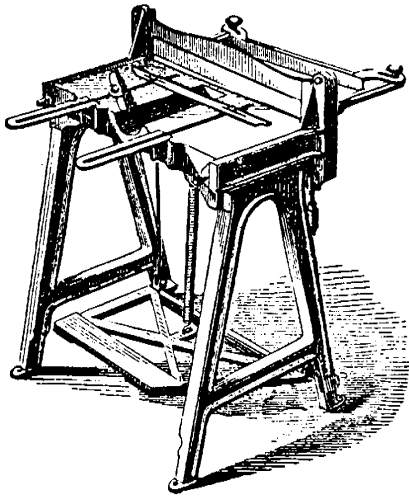
Slumping of the boiler pit and associated erosion while the site was cultivated have conspired to destroy much of the center and west of the site. We are left with a picture of a second cannery that was a shrunken enterprise, rebuilt with the proceeds of partial insurance coverage, that was no longer described in superlatives. The technology lagged behind the state of the art, most noticeably (from excavated data) in the fact that filler holes were punched separately.

Pieces of can-making presses were not recognizable in the archæological record. Only one soldering iron (or, more properly, a "copper") was found, and it was broken before burial. Heat of the fire could have been expected to ruin the precision-milled cast-iron machinery, but it was either absent or was salvaged. Over the years that followed, parts of the old cannery were hauled away. The robbed walls indicate several episodes of brick robbing. Finally the site was returned to cultivation until the duplex apartment was build on the south end of the site. Then the piece of a field in the project area was abandoned and allowed to grow up in trees.

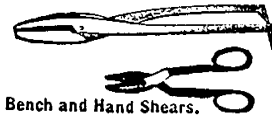
Every cannery must have produced a large waste pile. The Lebanon cannery waste pile has fortuitously survived for study, to give us a glimpse into the working conditions and thought processes of can-makers. Tinsplate trash from Lebanon reveals both thought processes and factory disciplines during a period when American industry was making the transition from craft to factory.

Figure 27

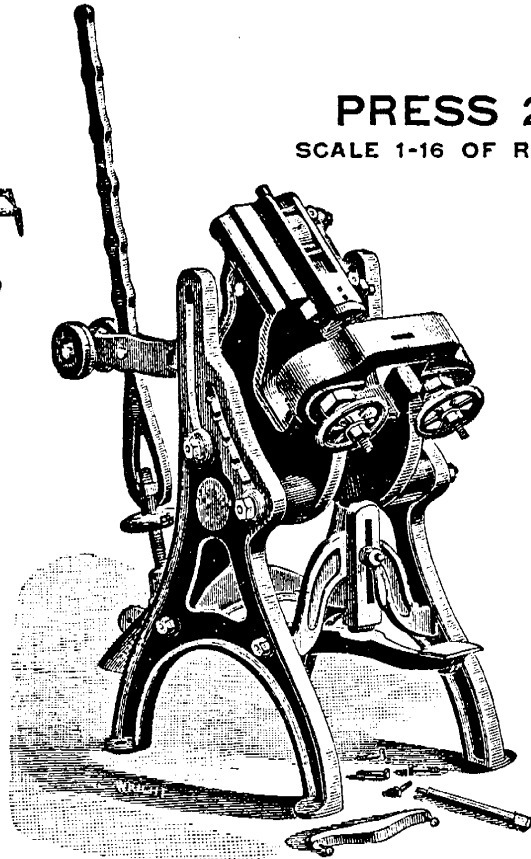
Illustrations from the Ferracute Machine Company catalogue



20 inch Squaring Shears.

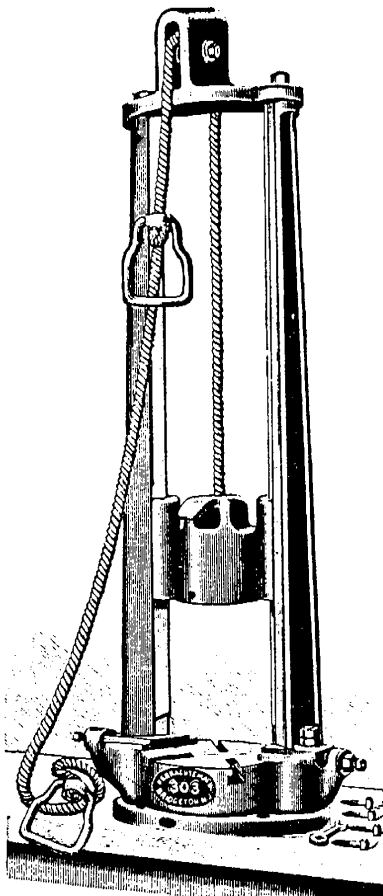


Bench and Hand Shears.

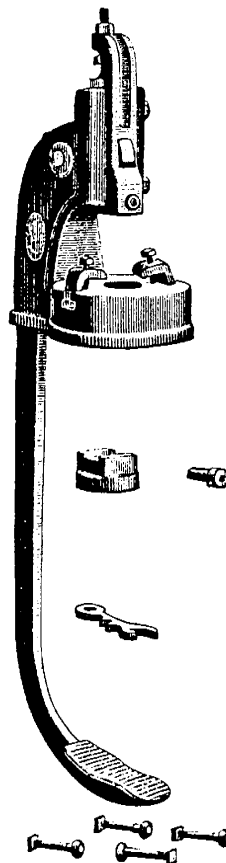


PRESS 243.

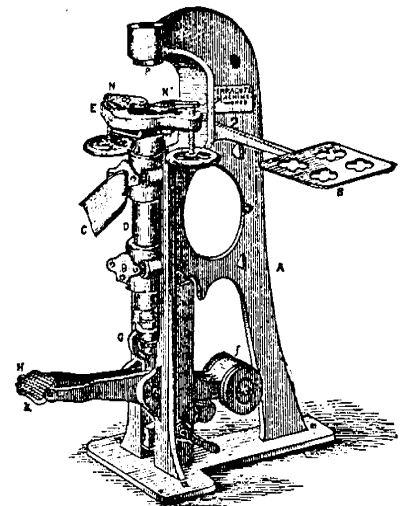
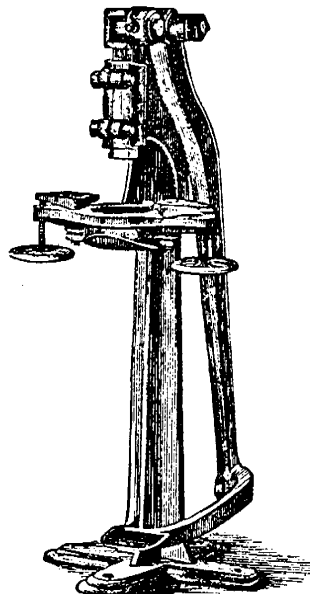
SCALE 1-16 OF REAL SIZE.



Hand Drop Press.



Pendulum Foot Press.



Pendulum Foot Press. Bottom Slide Foot Press.



Plate 47

The all-masonry Romeo cannery in Dover reflected a change in the canning industry toward more substantial buildings owned by out-of-state combines. State Department of Agriculture glass plate negative # 82, Delaware Archives.

Throughout the nineteenth century, canners tried to improve their product and their production methods, but most cans continued to be made individually by workers in the loft over the canning factory. Americans patented many different processes and machines, which may be used as dating evidence on sites where cans have survived. Some of the innovators founded canneries that produced their peculiar cans; Richardson and Robbins' famous tapered plum pudding can was made in Dover within living

memory. By 1902, modern open-top cans had replaced most of the hole-in-top styles; these cans are made by machine in separate manufacturing plants. As the can manufacture and canning industries separated, food containers became standardized and less sensitive to archaeological analysis.

As a stage in the development of American manufacturing, the Lebanon cannery provides insights into the larger history of technology. Tinsmithing is an ancient art, practiced even today by highly trained craftsmen who draw upon a long craft tradition. A master tinsmith could make the finest tin cans, but they would be too expensive and there would never be enough of them. As the canning industry began to grow, a new kind of tinsmithing was invented to meet the demand for cheap containers made quickly in quantity.



Plate 48

Scott and Daly's Dover cannery (1929-1931), shown here during off season, succeeded the Liberty Brands company in one of the last Dover plants. State Department of Agriculture glass plate negative # 1020, Delaware Archives.